Unitarian Horizons

October 15, 1937

TWO SONGS

DURING the war I heard Ian Hay, in an address to several hundred American soldiers, describe the difference between the British and the Americans in terms of two anecdotes. It seems that a British transport had been torpedoed not long before, and when the "Tommies" on board had been rescued and landed they gathered in groups around bonfires and began to sing. The first song they chose was a hymn — "O God our help in ages past."

Just about the same time, another transport,

with American troops on board, was hit by a torpedo, and when the soldiers lined up on deck preparatory to taking to the boats, they also began to sing; but they didn't choose a hymn. What they sang was "Where do we go from here, boys?".

In the spontaneous choice of those two songs, so the speaker suggested, you could find the key to deep and important differences between the two great English-speaking nations, and also the key to their fundamental similarities.

Whatever may be the true interpretation of the choice of songs on these particular occasions, all of us will agree that the songs men sing together — on whatever occasion — are among the best indications of their character and among the most powerful influences upon their lives. True of an army, this is no less true of a church.

"HYMNS OF THE SPIRIT"

THE announcement that our new hymn book will be published in time to be used at the General Conference in Niagara Falls is, therefore, of very great significance. For more than seven years a special Commission, in which Unitarians and Universalists have worked together, has been engaged in the enormously difficult task of creating a new hymnal for the churches of the free spirit. Only those who have had the actual experience at first hand can fully

appreciate the amount of patience and skill that are required to achieve such a result, and the debt of gratitude which we all owe to the men who have now completed their arduous labor of love. Most of the hymns and tunes in such a book will carry the names of their authors, but the work of the editors is usually anonymous. That is an additional reason for those of us who understand the immense value of their service to bear it gratefully in mind.

Surely the best way to express that gratitude will be to take full advantage of the opportunity which the publication of the new book presents. Coming just at this particular moment, when the currents of a new vitality are beginning to be felt throughout our fellowship, the new hymnal will become one of the most powerful influences in the deepening of our common spiritual life. "In the hymn book is the true key to the doctrine of the communion of saints: for here the saintly ones of all ages meet in their saintliest mood." These words stand at the beginning of the *Hymn and Tune Book* which for more than twenty years has done so much to enrich the services of worship in our churches. They are repeated in the Foreword to the new book. And anyone who meditates upon their meaning will discover the basic reason for the decisive influence which a good hymnal may exert. If we are prepared to make full use of this new instrument for reverent worship, it can well be an epoch-

making event for liberal religion in America. And happily we have a notable example to follow in this regard.

A GREAT GIVER

NOT for many years, I think, have the Unitarian churches of America received so wise and generous a gift as that which came to us a few months ago from a distinguished layman of the First Church in Chicago, at the suggestion of his minister. The death of Morton D. Hull in August brought sadness to every Unitarian who knew of his long and devoted service to the Church of which he was a member, but it also released us from the pledge of secrecy as to the name of the donor of the gift to which I refer. It was the last in a long line of benefactions for which Unitarians will never cease to be grateful.

For a long time Mr. Hull had been interested in the slow but steady progress of the work on the new Unitarian Hymnal as a concrete example of how religious liberals can work together for spiritual ends. He realized how important it would be that the new book should be adopted by all our churches at the earliest possible moment. But he also realized that few publishing ventures are more costly than a really first-rate hymn book, and he was troubled by the fact that the price of the new book would necessarily be higher than many of our churches could afford to pay.

A GREAT GIFT

AFTER consultation with Dr. Vogt, who was not only his minister but also a member of the Hymn Book Commission, Mr. Hull decided to give to the American Unitarian Association the sum of $5000, to be used to reduce the price of the first edition of the new hymnal. This means that the first ten thousand copies will be sold for $1.25 each instead of $1.75 each. Indeed, it means more than that, for if the first edition is promptly sold out, it will probably be possible for the second edition to be sold at the same price. It may well prove that Mr. Hull's gift will reduce the price of every copy of the new book to be sold during its lifetime.

It would be difficult to imagine a gift that would mean more to the cause of Unitarianism in America. Think for a moment or two just what it implies, in terms of your own local parish. If yours is a church that will need 200 copies of the new book, Mr. Hull's gift to your church will be in the amount of $100. If you need 100 copies, his gift means that your new hymn books will cost you $50 less than the actual cost price. (Of course, the hymnals will be sold without any profit to anyone.)

Or suppose your church can afford $100 for the purchase of new hymn books. At cost price, you could buy fifty-seven copies. With Mr. Hull's gift, you can now buy eighty. Similarly, an item of $150 in your church budget would buy eighty-

five copies at cost price, and now it will buy 120. A little figuring will show you just what difference the reduced price will make to your own church, and how it will narrow the gulf between need and ability to pay. (Like a certain radio announcer, I suggest that you get out pencil and paper and start figuring now!)

WIDER POSSIBILITIES

THERE are still wider implications. Generosity is, fortunately, contagious; and what Mr. Hull has done will stimulate others to follow his example. There will be other Unitarians who will want to make a direct gift to their own churches as several have already arranged to do. I cannot think of anything that would make a better memorial gift than to present a set of the new hymn books to one's own parish church. To be sure, the life of a hymn book is limited, and such a gift would not last so long as a memorial window or a bronze tablet. But for at least twenty-five years it would be a living and moving influence at the very heart of the spiritual life of the church.

In the memorial to the Royal Scots Fusiliers, in the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh, there is a quotation from Thucydides, which runs as follows: "The whole earth is the tomb of heroic men and their story is not graven only on stone over their clay but abides every-

where, without visible symbol, woven into the stuff of other men's lives."

A memorial gift of a set of hymn books would weave into the lives of a whole generation of Unitarians the spiritual legacy of a devoted soul; and the influence of such a gift would be immortal, even when the "visible symbol" had gone.

Furthermore, there will be loyal Unitarians who will want to help strengthen the spiritual unity of our fellowship outside the limits of their own parishes. We have a great many small churches, many of them in remote places, on the frontiers of liberal religion, where the struggle to survive is desperate and the sense of belonging to a great and inclusive fellowship is hard to maintain. To give fifty new hymn books to such a church would be to invest a relatively modest sum of money in a cause which would bring dividends of denominational unity and strength for a quarter of a century.

BUILDING UNITY

THE supreme need of Unitarians today, as we all know, is a new sense of denominational unity. We have allowed ourselves to give a too exclusive emphasis to our basic principles of freedom of thought and local autonomy. We have not sufficiently realized the grave danger of an extreme individualism which must ultimately lead us toward anarchy, unless we

learn also the hard lesson of effective co-operation in liberty.

Of course, we must avoid the deadening influence of a mechanical and sterile uniformity. But we must learn how to achieve the unity of a great and commanding purpose.

For the creation of this new spirit, the new hymn book is the best possible tool. Broad and inclusive in its wealth of material, retaining the best of the old and freely making use of the best of the new, with high standards of literary and musical taste, it is far and away the best hymnal for liberal churches ever produced. Put promptly into use in every Unitarian church in the land, it will do more than anything else to bind us together into a living fellowship.

F. M. E.

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